

COUNCIL MEETING

15th July 2019

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC FOR ORAL REPLY

1. From David Silk to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

Orpington Priory Community Hub's bid for The Priory contained detailed plans for musical, family, educational and Festive events with pledges to work closely with local organisations and the Orpington community. V22 made similar pledges. What progress has V22 made fulfilling their promises to the local community the last 2 years?

Reply:

The question demanded a lengthy reply which V22 have produced (Appendix 1.) A brief summary is that they are indeed performing according to their agreed statements at the start. They are doing a tremendous amount of activity with the community and on behalf of the community. I am very satisfied that they are performing extremely well and that the building is really benefitting from their occupation. You will find more details in the written statement.

Supplementary Question:

Mr Silk stated that V22 had not done anything with the building, whereas others could have arranged many events if they had been given the opportunity. He asked what could be expected in the next six months.

Reply:

The details are included on the paper which I hope you will go away and read, and then perhaps you can email me with any further points you have to raise. I am completely satisfied that they have complied with what they said they were going to do and will continue to do so.

2. From Rev Catherine Shelley to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation and Housing

What funds are available to support groups in Bromley, such as the Bromley Churches, who are responding to homelessness?

Reply:

The Council currently provides over a million pounds in funding through a range of contracts for homelessness and housing support to a range of different organisations. Central government funding is also provided for rough sleeper outreach services which is currently delivered through Thames Reach; London Street Rescue. Bromley does work closely with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and

Local Government and the Greater London Assembly to apply for and access funding sources when these become available and will continue to assist all organisations in placing bids for available funding as these arise.

In addition the options and supports service offer housing advice outreach services, training and financial assistance for client access to accommodation or essential items to groups working to assist in supporting and resolving homelessness.

Supplementary Question:

What funds are available to provide permanent homes to re-house those who are homeless, whether on our streets, or sofa-surfing, or in temporary housing?

Reply:

The Council has a statutory duty to house people who come to us as homeless. They have to pass rigorous tests for that. Funds are available - it is currently costing the Council towards £10m a year to house homeless people, so those funds are definitely available. We also have a programme of building some more homes for homeless people in the borough.

3. From Rick Das to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families

An initial special-needs assessment with a Development Paediatrician is a crucial step towards assessing any special-needs provision for a child. Would the portfolio holder please provide average and maximum waiting times for Development Paediatrician appointments in the borough during 2017, 2018 and if possible, during the first half of 2019?

Reply:

I am advised by my colleagues at Bromley Clinical Commissioning Group that the average waiting time for April 2017 to March 2018 was eleven weeks with a maximum waiting time of twenty-eight weeks.

The average waiting time for April 2018 to March 2019 was eight weeks with a maximum waiting time of thirty-three weeks.

For the period April 2019 to June 2019 the average waiting time was seven weeks and the maximum waiting time was twenty-one weeks.

Supplementary Question:

It is in the interests of the client to reduce waiting times as much as possible. What measures are currently in place to keep waiting times to a minimum?

Reply:

We do want to drive waiting times down and colleagues here are working with the provider, Bromley CCG, to find ways to keep them as low as possible.

4. From Rich Wilsher to the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Community Services (Mr Wilsher was not present so a written reply was sent.)

What direct power does the Council possess to tackle idling across the borough? How has it utilised these over the past 12 months, and how does it plan to utilise these going forward?

Reply:

The Council has not yet adopted the powers to enforce against idling vehicles. However Bromley's LIP3 sets out our ambition to participate in an anti-idling education campaign primarily around schools including the probable adoption of enforcement powers.

5. From Julie Ireland to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management

How many Freedom of Information requests did the Council receive in 2017/18 and 2018/19 and what percentage were answered within the statutory time limit?

Reply:

The number of Freedom of Information requests received by the Council in 2017/18 and 2018/19 and the percentages answered within the time limit were as follows - 1,212 (63.55) and 1,472 (71.7%.) The figures for 2019 to date are 309 requests received (92.3%)

Supplementary Question:

I do not know if you are aware of the report from the Campaign for Freedom of Information that ranks Bromley as the third worst in London for replying to requests, based on the data you supplied. I note that performance has improved, but are you going to take further steps so that people do not have to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office?

Reply:

I was asked this question last year, and I gave figures which showed that our performance was improving. It has improved substantially, which you have recognised. We do have a lot of questions that come in from lazy journalists or would-be politicians, but most of them are from genuine residents and we are pleased that the figures have improved.

6. From Rev Catherine Shelley to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management

How many claims for Discretionary Housing Payment have been made in the past 6 months and what is the average duration of such payments?

Reply:

In the 6 month period 1 January 2019 to 30 June 2019, 929 applications for Discretionary Housing Payments were received.

Using Discretionary Housing Payments awarded in the financial year 2018/19 as the base for calculating the average duration of payment, the average was 28.4 weeks. However, those requesting ongoing assistance are required to reapply on an annual basis; therefore a number of the recipients will have also received help in the previous financial year.

Supplementary Question:

Given the quite high level of claims and duration of claims, what steps is the Council taking to assist people in finding smaller or cheaper accommodation, so that they do not have to claim discretionary housing payments. Your colleague, in response to an earlier question, indicated that the Council would build new homes, but did not give any details of how many or what sizes of accommodation would be built.

Reply:

There are a variety of projects that are currently being worked on through Housing. The most complete one involves the purchase of 400 houses under what is known as More Homes Bromley. That is virtually completed now, and there will probably be a phase 2 which is currently being worked on in Housing, and there are other initiatives being taken forward.

7. From Rick Das to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families

Recently, a BBC report (BBC News, 2019) suggested there are 1,580 children across the country with education and health care plans (EHCPs) with no education provision and that a number of these children have been waiting for over a year to be given a provision. Would the Portfolio Holder please advise if the borough has any children with EHCPs awaiting provision, what the current average and maximum waiting times are and what steps the Council is taking to facilitate speedier processing of EHCP provisions?

(Reference -

BBC News. (2019). *Special needs pupils 'kept out of school'*. [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-48663873> [Accessed 1 Jul. 2019].)

Reply:

There are currently 7 children of statutory school age that are coded as awaiting an education placement. The average time for placement for this cohort of children is 5 months, with 7 months recorded as the maximum waiting time. Of those seven children, three have recently moved into Bromley, with existing Education, Health and Care Plans.

This cohort of children is monitored regularly as part of a monthly review of vulnerable groups which is overseen by the Director of Education.

8. From Julie Ireland to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families

What percentage of social workers currently employed in Bromley's Children's Services are on permanent contracts and what percentage are on temporary contracts, and how does this compare for the years to March 2018 and March 2019?

Reply:

I am grateful for this question as it highlights some of the great work that has been done in the borough. When we started on our Ofsted improvement journey we had 42% of staff in permanent positions, and 585 agency staff.

In March 2019 we had 70% permanent and 30% agency. Now, we have 74% permanent and 26% agency.

Supplementary Question:

I agree with the Portfolio Holder that there has been fantastic progress, but does he recall the reasons for what Ofsted said, that the disintegration of the service was because you did not replace a departing Director of Children's Services. I wanted to know if you would be replacing Mr Adetosoye now that he has been promoted to Chief Executive.

Reply:

A lot of issues were thrown up by the Ofsted report which we have embraced. We will look to have a suitable Director in place as soon as possible.

Statement from V22

During the first phase of V22's custodianship of The Priory, we have let out those spaces that are self-contained and in a good state of repair – meeting our commitment to provide studios for local artists and creative businesses whilst bringing in revenue to help fund further works. We are currently at 78% occupation in the Priory building. The Great Hall has been retained as a community space that can be opened to the public.

We have participated in Open House London 2017 and 2018 attracting a significant number of visitors to the space and hosted the Christmas Carol service in 2017. We have also hosted the Enchanted Children's festival 2018 and 2019. We had an artists' talk in 2018 as part of our Young London Extended Programme that attracted many new visitors to the Priory. We are continuing to work with this artist to develop a sculpture and site-specific work to form the starting point for gardens in the front of the building and are in communication with a Bromley Museum curator with whom we hope to work in the future as well as Richard Gibbons of Friends of The Priory and Gardens.

Another local artist's practice-based Masters includes a great deal of research around the Priory, Orpington and local history. We are working with her toward presenting a show of this work in Autumn 2019.

We were due to host the London South East College Creative Industries Department end of year show in mid-June 2018. The college unfortunately cancelled the show in early June 2018. We were in talks with *Your Orpington (formerly Orpington Priory Community Hub)* and had offered to host a number of events throughout 2018 including a quiz night, village show and Christmas concerts. Unfortunately the events trustee never got back to us, though we are happy to pick this up again to collaborate on events.

We have had some requests that we haven't been able to pursue at the moment due to parts of the building not being in a usable state. To repair would require funding and building consent, which is a lengthy process. For example, viewings have been held regularly and though there has been some interest for things like Yoga and children's dance workshops, on viewing the space, concerns about the floor being too cold has meant such workshops have fallen through. We always keep such requests on file to be contacted in the future, when the spaces become more usable.

We have also had some requests that are unfeasible for the safety and security of the building, such as fireworks and graffiti workshops. All requests are monitored and replied to. All visitors who have expressed an interest in contributing to a more formal events programme once it is established (as they require production support etc.) are kept on file for the future.

We had extensive conversations from mid-2018 with a local café provider, which we hoped to launch this Summer. Unfortunately this fell through, though we hope to revisit this in the future with the same provider or another local provider.

We have been in dialogue with London South East College to collaborate on a number of projects and, as is the nature of working with a larger education institution, this has been a gradual process. We have four different projects that we will be working with the college on and that we expect to be on going throughout 2019 and 2020. These projects include: organising a clean-up day of the surrounding Priory areas with students in construction; a landscape design project with the built environment and architecture students to create a design proposal for the front car park as a garden and event space; and commissioning a research and marketing project for students to design a questionnaire and research tool on the use of the Priory in order to engage and attract a diverse range of users for the space. Finally, we have offered use of the Great Hall to host exhibitions by the college students and hope to have more collaboration and events in future.

We have been advertising the use of the Great Hall for community use but, other than the above, have not had much interest. We are excited to develop a long-term community programme in Orpington, from our experience with other spaces; this does take time, careful planning and funding in order to be successful. We are also sensitive to upholding the condition of the building and its listed status. Once we have more tenants move into the space this should become more sustainable.

We are currently trialling a booking platform with our Community Studio in Forest Hill, to make community hire easier and if successful we will extend it to the Great Hall of the Priory.

Works are underway to convert the former library into 19 studios. The future tenants who have already booked spaces are planning to host workshops and understand that they will become part of a community programme which can become the part of the neighbourhood around it. Once these studios are full there will be a considerably greater presence in the building, and we hope the burgeoning community and events programme will continue to grow.